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Blurring of FBI, CIA feared

Webster urged to keep 'bright line' between two

By Sam Meddis
USA TODAY

FBI Director William Webster's nomination to head the CIA — though popular on both sides of Capitol Hill — raises sticky interagency questions.

Reason: The CIA — created in 1947 when the terror of Nazi Germany's all-powerful Gestapo was still fresh in lawmakers' minds — is barred by law from engaging in domestic law enforcement. Domestic security is the FBI's job.

After meeting with President Reagan at the White House Wednesday, Webster said that while the CIA and FBI will cooperate when necessary for national security, "they will continue to be separate."

But Webster's transition to the CIA could nevertheless give the public a "blurred image" of the two agencies' functions, said former CIA Deputy Director Ray Cline.

Webster won't ignore the agencies' distinctions, said John Greaney of the Association of Former Intelligence Officers, but there's a danger that lack of separation will "be the image and inference that will be drawn."

Sen. William Cohen, R-Maine, said the line separating the CIA and FBI must be kept "very bold and bright." But he's confident Webster will stay on the right side.

Cohen said it will take about three weeks for the FBI to complete its background investigation of Webster. Webster will have to explain a delay he agreed to before allowing the FBI to investigate a Miami airline believed to have had a role

White House says it has no FBI candidates

The White House says it has "no candidates yet" to replace FBI Director William Webster — but speculation centered Wednesday on federal Judge Lowell Jensen of San Francisco.

"I am not a candidate for the top FBI job," said Jensen. "I am completely satisfied with my position here."

But he declined to say whether he'd turn it down.

Other names: John Simpson, head of the U.S. Secret Service, and Associate Attorney General Stephen Trott, although he's said in the past he's not interested.

Unlike the CIA director — who serves at the will of the president — the FBI director serves a 10-year term. That law was passed in 1976 — after the lengthy and turbulent reign of former FBI director J. Edgar Hoover. Hoover served for 48 years before his death in 1972.

in the delivery of weapons to the contra rebels in Nicaragua.

But Cohen said: "I really don't see any major problem."

Others agree. Rep. Don Edwards, D-Calif., head of a House civil rights subcommittee, called Webster a "straight shooter" who wouldn't tolerate CIA abuses.

Former CIA Deputy Director Bobby Inman, who'd supported current CIA Deputy Director Robert Gates for the agency's top job, said Webster's nomination was "certainly the second-best outcome we could have hoped for."